

# Developmental Disabilities

## Family Dynamics

# Overview

- Disability/Mental illness effect much more than the person with the disorder
- It effects the family and society
- Society and family units also effect the individual

# Family Defined (What and who is a Family?)

- Families are big, small, extended, nuclear, multi-generational with one parent or two. We live under one roof or many. A family can be as temporary as a few weeks or as permanent as forever. A Family is a culture unto itself, with different values and unique ways of realizing its dreams.

# Family Defined

- Families are not collections of individuals
- Each member has a life all their own yet are always connected to other members

# Family Roles

- We all have many roles that we assume in our lifetime.
- Many roles are family roles (mother, father, child, infamous 'black sheep', sibling)
- Rules and roles govern family behavior and interaction

# Family Rules

- Some rules are discussed openly, others may be unspoken or unconscious.
- Due to social stigma, some families have a “Don’t talk about\_\_\_\_\_” rule with a person who has a disability.
- These rules are powerful and may descend generations

# Family Stress

- A disability profoundly affects family dynamics.
- Roles are altered
- Influenced by both external and internal factors.
- World events/society effects family systems.

# Family Stress (who and what is a family)

- Family strength is vulnerable
- "Families are much like a house of cards. Each is supported by and depends on the other. When stress affects one card, the entire house may lean. And sometimes the house falls."



# Mental Illness and Disability

- The number of children surviving disabling medical conditions is increasing due to medical advances.
- Disorders are common: universal, in all countries and societies, ages, gender and social class.

# Family Unit

- Required to provide support
- Bear the social stigma and discrimination
- Disrupts family routine
- May restrict social activities
- Financial Burden
- Transportation

# Family Unit (positive)

- Mahoney found that a disabled child can have a positive effect on the family by
- focusing energy in a concerned, loving manner, minimizing some of the other day to day problems.
- New appreciation for life

# Parental Reaction

- Shock
- Anger
- Depression
- Guilt
- Sadness
- Anxiety

# Parental Reaction

- People handle these feelings differently and may stay in some stages longer than others.
- May perceive the disability as an extension of themselves and feel shame, social rejection, embarrassment

# Parental Reaction

- Grief over loss of a dream
- “Welcome to Holland” by Emily Persley depicts a mother’s reaction to a disabled child
- Grieving takes place before acceptance in most cases

# Parents

- Children with disabilities have higher emotional, economic, physical and social needs. This puts additional stress on parents.
- Parents without support may be at higher risk for maltreating a disabled child.
- Feel overwhelmed, hopeless, unable to cope.

# Parents

- Increased stress if the child has communication difficulties.
- Combination of factors can lead to physical discipline
- Rates of maltreatment of children with DD are high



# Parents

- Disabilities were found to be twice as prevalent among abused children in a hospital study. This supports the claim that children with disabilities are at an increased risk for being maltreated.

# Siblings

- May encounter less parental attention
- Increased chore and care responsibilities
- At risk for poor peer relationships
- Lower level of outside participation in activities
- May feel neglected/ignored

# Siblings

- Tend to adapt the attitudes of their parents towards the disabled child
- Faber Study: found the variable which was of the greatest importance was the degree of dependence of the disabled child

# Siblings

- The more dependent the disabled child, the more adverse the relationship with siblings
- Siblings report feelings of jealousy and resentment about parents focusing on the disabled child.

# Siblings

- Robinson and Robinson Study: Found that when non-disabled children are expected to assume maturity and responsibility beyond their years they are likely to suffer serious consequences.